



US-2024-1

**MINUTES OF THE OPEN SESSION
OF THE MEETING OF SENATE**

Friday, February 9, 2024,
in the Norman D. Hébert, LLD Meeting Room
(Room EV 2.260) SGW Campus
and via Zoom video conferencing

PRESENT

Voting members:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Graham Carr (Chair) | Effrosyni Diamantoudi | Deep Patel (left at 3:19 p.m.) |
| Angelica Antonakopoulos | Mehdi Farashahi | Zachary Patterson |
| Leslie Barker | Ariela Freedman | Véronique Pepin (zoom) |
| Matthew Barker (arrived at 3:09 p.m.) | Annie Gérin | Mahshid Rahbari |
| Beverley Best | Marina Ghali | Ian Rakita |
| Theresa Bianco (zoom) | Steve Henle | Rosemary Reilly (zoom) |
| Alexandrah Cardona | Arnav Ishaan (zoom) | Pat Riva (attended on behalf of Amy Buckland) |
| Sally Cooke (zoom) | Raghulkanna Lakshmanan (zoom, arrived at 3:04 p.m.) | Pascale Sicotte |
| Anne-Marie Croteau | Michael Lecchino | Ahmed Soliman |
| Fabienne Cyrius | Christopher Moore | Melissa Spiridigliozzi |
| Alexandra Dawson | David Morris (zoom) | Sofiène Tahar |
| Niraj Dayanandan | Catherine Mulligan (zoom) | Craig Townsend |
| Selvadurai Dayanandan | Xavier Ottenwaelder (zoom) | Roberto Viereck-Salinas |
| Mourad Debbabi | Robert Padmore | Anne Whitelaw |
| Larry Deck | Mireille Paquet | Radu Grigore Zmeureanu |

Non-voting members: Philippe Beauregard, Paul Chesser, Denis Cossette, Stéphanie de Celles, Michael Di Grappa, Isabel Dunnigan (zoom), Nadia Hardy (zoom), Frederica Jacobs, Stefana Nita, Carlos Santana, Olivia Ward

Also attending: Caroline Baril, Howard Bokser (zoom), William Cheaib, Richard Courtemanche (zoom), Sandra Gabriele

ABSENT

Voting members:

Dominique Bérubé
Roy Cross
Bonnie Harnden

Dany-Ariel Ishimwe
Charles Rohinth Joseph
Mehdi Kharazmi

Moshe Lander
Harley Martin

1. Call to order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

1.1 Approval of the Agenda

R-2024-1-1 Upon motion duly moved and seconded, it was unanimously resolved that the Agenda of the Open Session be approved.

1.2 Adoption of December 15, 2023, Minutes

R-2024-1-2 Upon motion duly moved and seconded, it was unanimously resolved that the Minutes of the Open Session meeting of December 15, 2023, be adopted.

CONSENT

- **Tribunal Pool/Committee Appointments** (Document US-2024-1-D1)

R-2024-1-3 Upon motion duly moved and seconded, it was unanimously resolved that the Tribunal Pool and Committee appointments be approved.

- **Committee reports** (Document US-2024-1-D2)

This report was provided for information only.

- **Academic Programs Committee - Report and recommendations**
(Document US-2024-1-D3)

R-2024-1-4 Upon motion duly moved and seconded, it was unanimously resolved that the report and recommendations of the Academic Programs Committee be approved.

REGULAR

- **Business arising from the Minutes not included on the Agenda**

There was no business arising from the Minutes not included on the Agenda.

- **President's remarks**
- Dr. Carr began his remarks by noting that the Québec government issued the *Règles budgétaires* ("RBs") in the week of January 22nd, essentially confirming December's announcements on tuition increases for Rest of Canada students and tuition claw backs for international students. There was another detail that emerged in the RBs, that students from the Rest of Canada studying at francophone universities would continue to pay the former tuition rate of \$9,000 rather than the increased rate of \$12,000 that those attending anglophone universities will pay.
- Prior to the holiday break, the University had announced the creation of the Canada Scholars Award, an attempt to bridge the gap between previous tuition rates and the newly increased rates. This award is a merit-based scholarship of \$1,000-\$4,000 automatic for all new students from the Rest of Canada with B- average or higher, and it will be renewable throughout recipients' program of study. Unfortunately, the recruitment process has been further complicated by the government's announcement that, beginning in 2025, the anglophone universities will need to work to bring 80% of non-Québec students to an intermediate level of French proficiency. This number is twice what had been proposed by the anglophone universities, and it is an unrealistic number for various reasons. The announcement that came in late 2023 created another layer of confusion for prospective students, and questions came up about whether they can graduate without French proficiency, and whether additional credits or semesters of coursework would be required to complete their degrees. Due to the lack of clarity from the government around these issues, the University has been unable to respond definitively to these questions beyond affirming that students registering in 2024 will not be covered by the francisation requirement. The government created a joint working group of the three anglophone universities and the *Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur* to define the mandate and the consequences of this new requirement, but the details are still to be clarified. P. Sicotte, I. Dunnigan and D. Cossette shall be representing the University on this dossier and in continued discussions with the government.
- There has been a precipitous decline in applications, with a current decline of 27% in Rest of Canada applications and 10% decline in international undergraduate student applications. This is very worrying in terms of revenue, but also for the message it sends about Québec and Montréal's image as a place to learn and live. The mairesse of Montréal had publicly spoken against the policy, calling it an attack on Montréal, which resulted in some backlash from CAQ officials in response to her comments.
- Last week, a report was made public by the *Comité consultative sur l'accessibilité financières aux études*, a body that advised the *Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur* on matters related to higher education. The report was critical of the government for the increases to tuition for Rest of Canada students, pointing out that there was no financial analysis or data to accompany the decision and that it was in stark contradiction to Québec's stated commitment to accessible higher education. The Minister's response was to dismiss its findings because it had been submitted 4 days after the original deadline for submitting the report, which coincided with the

publication of the RB's. This story was covered by *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse*, and *Radio Canada*.

- There has also been a substantial decline in graduate international applications. Various factors have contributed to this decline, including the poor state of Canada-India relations, chronic visa processing challenges, the Québec government's decision not to grant automatic access to the PEQ for non-francophone international graduates of anglophone universities, and the recent federal announcement putting quotas on international student visas in some provinces. These combined factors are creating massive challenges for universities across Canada. However, on the bright side, there has been an increase of approximately 30% in graduate applications from Québec residents, mostly in thesis programs. The University is continuing to work overtime to convert as many applications as possible to confirmations by the March 1st application deadline.
- Dr. Carr reminded Senate that Winter Open House is scheduled for the following Saturday. Notwithstanding the decline in registrations, the goal was to continue to accentuate all the positives of the programs offered by Concordia, as Concordia remains a great university with very good program offerings. Dr. Carr thanked everyone for the continued efforts, even in these challenging times.
- Dr. Carr then spoke of the situation on campus owing to the conflict in the Middle East. The University Team is continuing to monitor the situation closely with the intent of de-escalating tensions. He reminded faculty and teaching assistants that the Centre for Teaching and Learning has resources and offers workshops to help navigate the difficult conversations that are being had in classrooms. He also noted that the University is going to be unveiling a new initiative, some details of which will be shared with Senate today.
- Dr. Carr spoke to the unfortunate event that happened last Friday where, as part of the student protests against the tuition hike that had also included voices protesting against the continued violence in the Middle East, a banner was displayed outside of the McGill campus with images of McGill's Principal Dr. Deep Saini and Concordia's Chancellor J. Wener associating both with genocide. Dr. Carr noted that such personalization is both appalling and extremely distasteful, even more so because the Chancellor is a volunteer role and not part of Concordia's administration. Mr. Wener is a huge champion of the University who has contributed immensely to the community over the years. Dr. Carr stated that he hopes that Senate shares his sentiment that such characterizations are unacceptable in our midst at the University.
- Dr. Carr then shared some positive news, beginning by reporting that five members of the Concordia community were named to the Order of Canada: Dr. Osama Moselhi, a faculty member in the Department of Civil Engineering who has made significant contributions to the engineering of tall buildings, bridges, nuclear power plants, harbor and offshore facilities; has supervised and co-supervised over 100 masters and Ph.D. graduates; and has authored and co-authored over 400 scientific publications in the world of academia; Lino Saputo, who is a Concordia graduate, corporate leader

and campaign co-chair, Louis Francescutti, who is a Concordia alumnus, physician and currently a professor at the University of Calgary; Kim Thúy, who is an honorary doctorate recipient and a former member of the Board of Governors; Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, who is an honorary doctorate recipient and who also co-chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Canada's residential schools with Loyola Medal winner, Justice Murray Sinclair.

- Dr. Carr reported that, as part of his professional service, he chairs the board of U Sports, which is the national body that oversees university varsity athletics in Canada. Each year U Sports and the Governor General honor the top 8 academic all-Canadians in the country, which include 4 women and 4 men, who are both leaders in their sport and excel academically. One of this year's honorees is Emmy Fecteau, who is the captain of Concordia's women's ice hockey team. Emmy has an incredible story as she was born in Québec, and, while her parents wanted her to play ringette, she always wanted to play hockey like her friends. Emmy is studying Teaching English as a Second Language at Concordia.
- Lastly, Dr. Carr also reported on a major gift from Power Corporation of \$4M in support of Volt-Age. This is to help the development of innovative green technology and living labs associated with projects developed across Canada under the umbrella of the Canadian First Research Excellence Fund grant. Earlier this week, more than \$7.2M was allocated by Volt-Age to support first-phase research on 36 projects led by Concordia and its partner institutions, Dalhousie University, Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Calgary, ranging from highly technical engineering and system development to governance, climate monitoring.

2. Academic update (Document US-2024-1-D4)

A. Whitelaw noted that there was nothing to add to the written report that had been circulated. She invited Dean Gérin to share the recent accomplishments of two Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema alumni. Dean Gérin recognized the work of Vincent Rene-Lortie, whose first short film was nominated for best live action short at the Oscars, and Meryam Joobeur, whose first feature film was part of the Berlin International Film Festival.

3. Budget update

Dr. Carr began by underlining that budget matters are not normally discussed Senate. However, given the context of the challenges that the University is facing, he wanted to give a high-level update of where the University stands, the challenges it faces, and the repercussions for the academic sector.

From the originally forecasted amount of \$19M, the budget deficit has been revised to \$35M, which revised deficit was approved by the Board of Governors in December 2023 and also by the *Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur* as part of the plan de redressement, that must be approved by the government. He underscored that this is not the first time that Concordia has faced a deficit situation, and that the University has weathered these situations before. He went on to address the question of why the University was in a deficit to begin with, and

why it has increased, noting that the main reason for the deficit has been declining enrolment combined with increased expenses, mostly related to negotiated salary and benefit increases. After many years of constant growth, the University now will be facing a decline in enrolment, loss of tuition revenue, and, as a result, loss in government grants. Registration is the lifeblood of the university, so any fluctuation of student numbers has a significant impact.

Dr. Carr spoke to the decline in enrolment before the government announcement in October last year, noting that year-over-year since 2020-21, the University has seen a decrease of close to 1,700 students, which creates a major budget impact in terms of lost tuition and government grants that is cumulative because it is lost revenue for every year that a student would be enrolled. This decline had other contributing factors – post pandemic labour market realities, and the fact that the economy’s health is counter cyclical to university enrolment. When the labour market is robust, people move to the job market and, when the job market is weak, historically, university enrolment sees an increase.

He added that it is publicly known that the entire education sector in the province is underfunded. The level of underfunding of the university sector is estimated to be \$1.4 billion and has also been recognized by people like Pierre Fortin (well known economist) and Rémi Quirion (Québec’s chief scientist).

The only way universities have been able to work through the underfunding is by growth in enrolment, and this model had worked successfully for Concordia in the past. However, this year is the first time that Concordia had seen a decrease in absolute numbers in terms of enrolment. The challenges faced by the University are not unique, other universities across Canada are experiencing similar challenges.

Dr. Carr then provided a brief overview of the budget system at Concordia, which included operating, capital and restricted funds. He provided a high-level overview of the three categories and how the categories are managed and the limitations on how the funding in each category may be used. He reminded Senate that Concordia and Polytechnique Montréal were the only institutions of higher learning in Montreal that had not received any infrastructure investment from the government in the past 10 years.

Finally, Dr. Carr underlined how much Concordia has changed over the last 10 – 15 years because of the growth in the student body, the increase in research activities, and the expectation to substantially increase services to students and increase staffing to ensure compliance with government regulations – whether on procurement, provision of French language services, cybersecurity and privacy requirements, auditing costs and so on, for which there is no choice but to invest.

Dr. Carr then asked A. Whitelaw to provide a bit more detail on the academic side and how declining revenues will affect the budget allocated to the academic portfolio.

Dr. Whitelaw provided an overview of the growth in student numbers over the past 10 years and the resulting increase in the number of programs offered at the University. The University saw an increase of about 100 programs in 10 years, which involves personnel,

resources and time investment on the part of the University. During the years of growth, the University had not conducted a review of the all the program offerings and how they may be optimized. Since May 2023, conversations around strategies to create efficiencies had begun.

While the budget situation requires certain cuts, which have been mandated, Dr. Whitelaw spoke to the need for deep reflection on which programs are offered, how they can be optimized and how resources can be allocated in the most efficient manner. She outlined that this was a collaborative process and that all Deans, departments and other groups at the University were working to develop strategies for maximizing the opportunities and the resources that are available.

Dr. Carr and Dr. Whitelaw responded to specific questions around the correlation between the increase in program offerings and student enrolment, and whether any cuts made in departments would also take into account how programs were performing.

There was a question about a freeze on new programs and if there would be an impact on bringing international faculty to Concordia. Dr. Whitelaw clarified that the implementation of new programs would require a longer process and, as such, no freeze is being contemplated at this time. The goal is strategic optimization overall.

Dr. Carr noted that, while there would be challenges, the University needs to also look at what opportunities may present themselves and how they may be leveraged.

On a question whether legal recourse was being considered against the recent government decisions, Dr. Carr responded that the University has been considering all options when reflecting on the impact of the policy, which only became official policy when the RBs were issued in the week of January 22nd.

4. Campaign against hate

Dr. Carr informed Senate of the launch of a new task force to address hate on campus. This was to be modelled on the previously successful Task Force on Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Violence and the President's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism.

This new task force initiative is being led by the Deputy Provost, Dr. Nadia Hardy, and will be co-chaired by faculty and staff. It will have several working groups which will focus on antisemitism, anti-Asian hate, transphobia, and islamophobia. There will also be a steering committee for the task force. The aim is to work as a community to find solutions moving forward. Dr. Carr also expressed hope that the work at Concordia would contribute to similar initiatives at other universities.

5. Question period

There were no additional questions asked during question period.

6. Other business

There was no other business to bring before the Open Session.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

K. Singh
Karan Singh
Secretary of Senate